



SOCIAL MEDIA: PROMISE AND OPPORTUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

The social media have gained importance due to the exponential increase in the number of Internet users all over the world. The social media have emerged as the media of the mankind since the mainstream media have remained the media of the dominant powers. The technological, social, economic and political factors have added new dimension to social media application. The social media have filled the vacuum created by the mainstream media from the points of view of participatory communication and development. They are the online platforms and locations that provide a way for people to participate in conversations, transactions and activities. The advent of high-speed Internet access has led to a proliferation of social networking sites in the world. Social media have transformed the lives of the people and produced great results in all spheres of human life. The current technological landscape shows tremendous promise and presents numerous opportunities for news and professionals despite certain potential pitfalls. The social media association had considerably reduced inter-personal relations and social interaction.

Preamble:

The social media are media for social interaction, using highly accessible and scalable communication techniques. Social media are basically web-based and mobile technologies to turn communication into interactive dialogue, according to Wikipedia. The social media are the most transparent, engaging and interactive form of public relations. They engage the users to participate in, comment on and create content as means of communicating with their social graph, other users and the public. The social media have emerged as the media of the mankind since the mainstream media have remained the media of the dominant powers in the age of globalization. In this article, the concept, features, merits and de-merits of social media are analyzed on the basis of qualitative research methodology.

Concept of Social Media:

Social media are basically Internet based information sources and resources. The earliest forms of the Internet, such as CompuServe were invented in the 1960s. The CompuServe Information Service was the first major commercial online service provider in the United States. It dominated the field of online communication till the mid-1990s. The consumer use of the Internet first became popular through dial-up Internet access in the 1990s. The Geocities were the first web-based social networking site developed by David Bohnett and John Rezner in 1994. They enabled the users to create their own websites. In 1995, TheGlobe.com was founded by Stephan Paternot and Todd Krizelman to enable the users to publish their contents and interact with the likeminded persons. In 1997, AIM was invented in North America to facilitate instant messaging application.

The SixDegrees.com was created as a social network service website by Andrew Weinreich in 1997. It was known as the Web of Contacts model of social networking which functioned effectively as a social media network till 2001. It was named after the six degrees of separation concept and allowed users to list likeminded persons and well wishers and established mutually beneficial contacts. Social media are Internet based means which connect the likeminded users. The online social network is useful for sharing information, ideas, experience and expertise in modern times. The social media have become all pervasive interactive and participatory communication tools and technologies in the world.

The social media allow interactions to cross one or more platforms through social sharing, email and feeds. They facilitate enhanced speed and breadth of information dissemination for one-to-one, one-to-many and many-to-many communications. They extend engagement by creating real-time online events, online interactions offline, or augmenting live events online. They allow people to network, to find people with like interests and to meet people who can become friends or associates. They are the online platforms and locations that provide a way for people to participate in conversations, transactions and activities.

The social media are both the connective tissue and neural net of the Web. They are a collection of online platforms and tools that people use to share content, profiles, opinions, insights, experiences, perspectives and media itself, facilitating conversations and interactions online between groups of people. They create new online communities and build relationships in all walks of life. They play a crucial role in every brand-building, maintenance and protection strategy.

The technological, social, economic and political factors have added new dimension to social media application. They are known for certain characteristics such as - free web space, free web address, building profiles, uploading contents, making conversations, chatting with clients and members, sending of e-mails and creating pages. The concept of social media is top of the agenda for modern corporate houses in the present times. Modern organizations have actively utilized social media for multi-purposes. The social media have moved into an era of blogging and instant messaging (Carton, 2009:09).

Social media can be called a strategy and an outlet for broadcasting, while social networking is a tool and a utility for connecting with others. The difference is not just semantics but in the features and functions put into these websites by their creators which dictate the way they are to be used (Cohen, 2009:10). The advent of high-speed Internet access has led to a proliferation of social networking sites in the world.

Social Media are defined as a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and facilitate the creation and exchange of User Generated Content (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010:15). The social media are Internet based mobile services that allow users to participate in online exchanges, contribute user created content, or join online communities. A number of factors have contributed to this rapid growth in social media participation.

The first one could be the definition; social media is still a media which is primarily used to transmit or share information with a broad audience, while social networking is an act of engagement as people with common interests associate together and build relationships through community (Hartshorn, 2010:12). Indeed, social media is simply a system, a communication channel; it is not a location visited by people. In contrast, social networking is a two-way communication, where conversations are at the core, and through which relationships are developed (Bedell, 2010:05). These include technological factors such as increased broadband availability, the improvement of software tools and the development of more powerful computers and mobile devices.

The social media can be used anywhere, at any time, where an Internet connection is available (Dewing, 2010:11). The social media have filled the vacuum created by the mainstream media from the points of view of participatory communication and development. Social media can be simply defined as the set of Web based broadcast technologies that enable the democratization of content, giving people the ability to emerge from consumers of content to publishers (Scott and Jacka, 2011:19). The social media have become an all pervasive media of communication in the world. The social media have become useful sources and resources in modern organizations including educational institutions (Cann, 2011:07).

Social media are digital interaction oriented channels and contents created by and between people. They allow people to network, to find people with like interests and to meet people who can become friends or customers. The social media are platforms for interaction and relationships, not content and advertisements. They are online technologies and practices that people use to share content, opin-

ions, insights, experiences and perspectives (Motaghem, 2016:16).

Social media is a series of websites and applications designed to allow people to share content quickly, efficiently and in real-time. Most people today define social media as apps on their Smartphone or tablet, but the truth is, this communication tool started with computers. Social media have transformed the lives of the people and produced great results in all spheres of human life (Hudson, 2017:14).

Salient Features of Social Media:

The social media have gained importance due to the exponential increase in the number of Internet users all over the world. The social sites are used in the modern society by various individuals and groups for multi purposes. They are interactive digital tools that feature content users may generate, manipulate, or influence. They are conducive to timely, interactive communication and foster dialogue and content exchange among message consumers and creators. They enable people to maintain and to extend their personal and professional networks. They have gained a great deal of attention and research for their ability to raise awareness of issues. The role of social media in modern times is highly visible. The users are also provided the tools to post content in real time. This content can be text, images, audio, video or even symbolic likes and dislikes. The social media facilitate conversations between the likeminded persons. All posts are time stamped, making it easy to follow posts. Social media encourages contributions and feedback from everyone who is interested. It blurs the line between media and audience.

Social media can create opportunities for two-way dialogue and interaction among organizations, the public, and individuals (Bortree and Seltzer, 2009:06). Social media is one of the major methods of social interaction around the world today. Social media is user-generated content distributed through the Internet with the intent to be shared and facilitate conversation between users (Wright and Hinson, 2010:23). Most social media services are open to feedback and participation. They encourage voting, comments and the sharing of information. There are rarely any barriers to accessing and making use of content – password-protected content is frowned on. The social media facilitate two-way communication and allow communities to form quickly and communicate effectively.

Social media software is the magic piece of the puzzle that can save social media managers time, keep them organized, and make the most of their efforts on social. The social media software refers to a platform or tools that make doing social media easier. These applications streamline processes and allow for better collaboration across teams, making them particularly useful for complex organizations. The social media software include social media management software, social media marketing software, social media monitoring software, social media customer service software, customer relationship management software and social selling software. The social media software meets a variety of these needs, allowing different teams from within an organization to use it effectively and efficiently (Walters, 2017:22).

Merits and De-Merits of Social Media:

Social media have grown tremendously in the last few years. The Facebook and Twitter have grown much faster and captured millions of users in just a few years. Every nation is utilizing the power of social media to enhance life and use it for the progress of the people. It is known for both advantages and disadvantages. It is ultimately left to the users to make use of the advantages of social media and improve their thoughts, deeds and personalities. The users also require suitable orientation to ensure optimum utilization of social media.

The social media have leveled the playing field for businesses as it is accessible to anyone, regardless of company size, turnover and contacts. The social media channels are extremely simple to use, even for people with basic IT experience. Modern organizations can communicate information in a flash, regardless of geographical location. The social media channels offer unparalleled opportunities to interact with customers and build relationships. The social media's adaptability makes content management generally more flexible. The social media services provide be an outlet for the users to share their ideas and thoughts with other people in a comfortable environment. They enable the users to connect with entire groups of people who are interested in the same things. The social media could be easily utilized to create cost effective strategies and campaigns that can create viral results (Hollier, 2009:13). The social media have embraced all spheres of human life and serve the mankind as the parallel media in times of peace and conflict.

The social media facilitate reputation management for modern organizations. The organizations can consistently reinforce the brand name. Brand awareness starts with the experiences of the employees of a company. Social media forum acts as a powerful way to communicate the brand value and brand attribute as they facilitate open forms of communication (Carraher et. al, 2009:08). The social media have become effective instruments of customer relations management, media relations management, community relations management and enable modern institutions to achieve the goal of corporate reputation management in modern times.

Greater social contact is related to reduction of morbidity while fewer contacts

lead to increased morbidity. Lack of social connection or loneliness is also associated with increased risk of cardiovascular disease. The Internet Paradox concluded that greater use of the internet was associated with declines in communication between family members in the house, declines in the size of their social circle, and increases in their levels of depression and loneliness. Another disadvantage of social networks is that it can help create something which does not exist or may not be as good as it is presented (Sigman, 2009:20). Social networks have accounted for the majority of time spent online since about 60 percent of people across the world have become active Internet users.

Social networking platforms may allow organizations to improve communication and productivity by disseminating information among different groups of employees in a more efficient manner, resulting in increased productivity. Social media advantages include – open communication leading to enhanced information discovery and delivery, discussion of ideas, post news, ask questions and share links, enhancement of business contacts, useful and effective recruitment, improvement of business reputation and implementation of marketing campaigns (Society for Human Resource Management, 2010). The social media have changed the profile of modern organizations and bridged the communication gap between organizations and various stakeholders of organization development.

The current technological landscape shows tremendous promise and presents numerous opportunities for news and professionals despite certain potential pitfalls. The social media have also posed serious challenges to media professionals. The users of print and electronic media are going online for their news. Most of the users receive their international and national news from the Internet (Alejandro, 2010:02). The social media are a form of collective wisdom which can be used to make quantitative predictions that outperform those of artificial markets. The social media provide the benefit of worldwide network development and bring the people under the common banner.

The social media are usually more accurate than other techniques for extracting diffuse information, such as surveys and opinions polls. The enormity and high variance of the information that propagates through large user communities presents an interesting opportunity for harnessing that data into a form that allows for specific predictions about particular outcomes, without having to institute market mechanisms (Asur and Huberman, 2010:03). The social media provide latest information on various issues, trends and developments. The users are enabled to take appropriate decisions and develop business transactions in modern times.

The industry is in an excellent position to benefit from all concomitant advantages social media can offer by evaluating goals and objectives, conducting professional research and by using a systematic approach; social networking enables us to change the nature of events in the future (Tretenhahn, 2011:21). The Internet is providing ways of fostering participation with community members and enhancing relationships through social media. The social media also allow companies, organizations, governments and parliamentarians to reach large numbers of people and enlist their active participation in various institution building and nation building activities.

The social networking sites have wasted the time and energy of people. The social networking invites major corporations to invade their privacy and sell personal information. Cyber bullying, spreading of misinformation, locating the whereabouts of the people, less real life interaction, risk of identity theft and fraud, drop out of users from schools and colleges, distraction from healthy habits and lifestyles, enabling the hackers to commit fraud, launch spam and virus attacks, victimization of people through online scams, inability to connect in person, lack of privacy, open to security issues, lesser productivity and health hazards are the major drawbacks of social media identified by the researchers across the globe (Nielsen, 2011:18). The social media have posed serious individual, institutional and social threats in modern times. The social harmony, national security and national integration are threatened by the vested interests who abuse social media.

Considerable progress is made by the modern organizations in responding to various opportunities by social media. The online world is rapidly evolving and some companies may embrace new technologies due to the pressure to be digital but are not thinking about what it means to the business in a virtual environment. The phenomenon of social networking and the development of social media (web-based and mobile technologies that turn text communications into active dialog) has been the most dramatic development in the information age over recent years (Bank and Bank, 2014:04). The social media have facilitated multi-faceted communication, transaction and opportunities to the individuals and organizations in all walks of life. They have brought the individuals and organizations together and cemented the communication gap.

The advantages of social media include social connectivity, social education, sharing of ideas, issues and concerns, updating about latest trends and development, personality development, business promotion, organization of social welfare activities, creation of social awareness, public opinion formation, social mobilization, political mobilization, people's participation in crisis management, disaster management and development activities, development of online communities, corporate communication and reputation management, commu-

nity relations, promotion of commonality of interest, interaction with customers and inclusive development of people. The social media have also become threats to the mankind. The abuse of social media by the users has led to several difficulties and disadvantages. The prominent disadvantages of social media include cyber bullying, spread of rumors, hacking of personal data, invasion of privacy, addiction of the social media, displacement of healthy activities, commission of frauds, manufacturing of scams, threat to security, cheating of people, immobility, ill-health, change of life styles, incorporation of unhealthy food habits, disorder in the routine life, suicidal tendency, increase of criminality, organization of terrorist activities, drug addiction, alcoholism and other hazards (Ahmad, 2016:01).

The Internet access is the process that enables individuals and organizations to connect to the Internet using computer terminals, computers, mobile devices, sometimes via computer networks. By 2017 this was almost ubiquitous worldwide, with a global average connection speed exceeding. The Internet access has changed the way in which many people think and has become an integral part of peoples economic, political, and social lives. The social media incorporate an instant messaging feature which facilitates exchange of information in real-time via a chat. Social networking can provide a tool for managers to utilize in team meetings, for conference organizers to use to update attendees and for business people to use as a means of interacting with clients or prospects.

The social media also provide free advertising services to the mankind about the activities and contributions of government and non-government organizations. The social media have led to the development of a near instantaneous news cycle as millions of social networking updates rapidly spread news and information. The social media have provided opportunities to the people to meet frequently and interact well for various purposes.

Conclusion:

The children, adolescents and youth do not find adequate time for face-to-face interactions with their peers and lose opportunities for developing social skills for their success. The use of social networks has exposed individuals to harassment or inappropriate contact from others. The users also encounter the risks of fraud and theft of identity on account of social media abuse (Mathew et. al, 2018:16). The healthy social activities naturally take a back seat when social networking becomes the prime agenda of the people. Excessive time spent on social networks causes some individuals to experience withdrawal symptoms. The social media have both advantages and disadvantages but the advantages weighed over the disadvantages. The social media association had considerably reduced inter-personal relations and social interaction.

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